

# CHRISTIAN DRAMA

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by Sir Francis Younghusband, K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E., and Mrs. O. Stevenson

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## Editorial

Twenty-one years ago—in June 1935—Mr. E. Martin Browne produced for the first time T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. It is difficult to estimate the tremendous influence the play has had since that first performance. It has been stated recently that even now, a production is always in progress somewhere. We are making this number of CHRISTIAN DRAMA a special twenty-first birthday issue for this play and include a retrospect by Mr. Martin Browne and a prospect by Mrs. K. M. Baxter. The staff spent an hour in prayer and dedication in St. Faith's Chapel, Westminster Abbey, on Thursday, May 31st. It was a great encouragement to us to know that so many of our members, in all parts of the country, were meeting us in prayer at that time.

The campaign to increase our membership is now fully launched. There is so much to be done in Religious Drama and so many calls for our help that it is imperative to increase our financial resources without which we cannot maintain the staff adequate to a proper fulfilment of our work. We are deeply grateful to S.P.C.K. for their generous and continued financial support, but any expansion or strengthening of our work depends basically on our membership. We can only impress on you again that the help we can give branches, groups or individuals; the re-establishment of the New Pilgrim Players; the organization of schools and festivals and all the other activities in demand depend on your active and personal co-operation in gaining new members in your area.

After a long and arduous search we are thankful to have found at last suitable offices at 166 Shaftesbury Avenue, W.C.2. The offices, which are on the second floor, are almost opposite the Saville Theatre—not far above Cambridge Circus. The nearest Tube stations are Tottenham Court Road and Leicester Square, and buses number 22, 38 and 38a pass the door. We hope that members will soon find their way to the Society's new home.

# “Murder” Comes of Age

E. MARTIN BROWNE

Twenty-one years ago this June, T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* was first produced in the Chapter House of Canterbury Cathedral. It is very seldom that a play becomes in so short a time an acknowledged masterpiece, and that its producer, knowing this, can look back over the whole history to the day of its first impact upon him.

I remember very well the first meeting of the cast—mostly local amateurs with the addition of Robert Speaight as Becket, Frank Napier as the Second Tempter and Knight, and myself as Fourth Tempter. We met in the County Hotel. I read the play to them. As the exalted verse of the dear scene unfolded the tension rose. . . .

“Wash the stone, wash the bone, wash the brain, wash the soul—wash them wash them!”

A pause.

“First Knight: We beg you to give us your attention for a few moments.”

A gasp came from every throat. The shock of the sudden descent into colloquial prose was even greater than that of Shaw's Epilogue to *Saint Joan*. It aroused many misgivings in cast and critics alike—and sometimes, like so many of the best paradoxes in Christian drama, it was misinterpreted by Christians themselves. “I really agreed with you,” said a devout lady to me once after seeing me play the Fourth Knight. . . .

This scene is most difficult to play just right. It should not be played for comedy: yet the banalities in the lines are shrewdly placed to give certain laughs and these cannot, in a theatre, be “killed” without losing the point of the lines. The laughs are also a good safety valve after the pain and poetry of the murder-scene, and before the almost ritual solemnity of the ending. In a church, however, the scene may well be treated quite differently—as in the Paris production, where translation nullified the comic effect of the English clichés and the whole of the Knights' argument was presented with fierce conviction, making frighteningly plausible.

The original Chorus was not present at the reading in the County Hotel. It consisted of students from Miss Fogerty's Central School of Speech and Drama. They came down, fully and excellently trained, to the final rehearsals; and this naturally resulted in their remaining somewhere outside the play. The longer I have worked upon it, in many subsequent productions, the more closely I have tried to integrate the Chorus with the active characters. Certain of the Chorus speeches are, of course, quite formal lyric odes, in the Greek pattern, but even in these one can find much individual characterisation. By giving lines expressing a certain mood

the same woman throughout one can break up the formal group into little community of individuals. Last summer in Gloucester Cathedral had my largest Chorus ever. It numbered sixteen (the original number was ten) and it became a richly varied unity, with ages ranging from sixteen to fifty and the physical and mental types as widely differentiated.

During rehearsals of the first production, I was exceptionally lucky in having plenty of time to think about the play. I spent seven weeks living quietly near Canterbury, rehearsing leisurely with the amateurs. This was of great value, for the play was in many respects a new kind of drama, and like all Eliot's writing it is packed with meaning. A detailed understanding of the lines is absolutely necessary to Eliot's producer: he may capture the less perceptive audiences and critics by means of spectacle, but he will not be serving the play if, as has happened in not a few important productions, lines are said without meaning. This is a poet's play: the words come first.

The Chapter House at Canterbury is a rectangular building, ninety feet by thirty-six, with a high vaulted roof which makes it bad for sound. In those days it had only one entrance—up the centre gangway. The Chorus stayed on throughout (I have always taken them offstage for the Temptations and the Knights' Meeting in subsequent productions). The Four Tempters, arriving together, crouched at the foot of the open platform stage, and ascended the steps one by one, each retreating and watching his successor at work from the back of the stage, until they made their final concerted attack on Becket. When banished, they made a running retreat down the ninety-foot aisle.

The play was given without a break. The author therefore provided, as substitute for the beautiful Chorus "Does the bird sing in the South?" always used in theatre productions, a symbolic passage to denote the passing of the three days between Christmas Day and the Martyrdom (December 29th). This little scene has a finely prophetic culmination in which the Third Priest speaks of

"the critical moment  
Which is always now and here."

In this the Knights enter and the climax begins to develop. I find this arrangement still the best for production in church or any place where an interval after the Sermon is not desired.

The Canterbury finale was long remembered. The bier of Becket was borne by Priests down the aisle to the chanting of the Litany of the Saints. The procession filed into the Great Cloister: and as the audience came out from the Chapter House they could still hear the distant singing, as if Thomas were being carried to his first resting place in the Cathedral crypt. In the evening, lighted candles added to the effect, as they afterwards did at Gloucester, where the bier was borne into the Choir.

The costume designs for the original production by Stella Mary Pearce are famous by now. Our most difficult problems were the Tempters and the Chorus. I feared that the modern relevance of the Tempters might be

missed unless some symbol suggesting their modern counterparts were incorporated in their costumes. Miss Pearce brilliantly interwove the top hat of the dandy, the medalled breast of the diplomat, the check plus-four of the country squire, with twelfth-century designs. It would no longer be necessary to do this today, when the play's ideas are familiar: but the Tempters still remain a designer's problem.

I myself believe that the original arrangement of "doubling" the part of Knights and Tempters is valuable to the play. It points out to the audience that the two forces of evil are really one—that the Fourth Knight, for instance, in arguing that Becket is a suicide, is repeating the suggestion put into Becket's mind by the Fourth Tempter, and thereby it unifies the whole experience of Becket, showing it as a single struggle toward Christian acceptance.

The Chorus must be designed as a unity: they are not just a bunch of poor women. Originally, they were as brightly coloured as a medieval stained-glass window: but that was because they had to compete with a painted wall as background. It is quite possible to suggest poverty by using colours less bright, yet to make a unity of beautiful tones, as in Miss Pearce's recent designs for Hull and Gloucester. Since the audience has to look at them for most of the play, it is necessary that the eye should be satisfied.

Eliot wrote *Murder in the Cathedral* for a run of eight performances. Only Ashley Dukes at the tiny Mercury Theatre made any move to perpetuate it by a transfer to London. Only after a year's run there did a single West End manager offer it house room. Even after that, it took the shock of a phenomenal success at the Grand, Leeds, to make the provincial theatres book it for two major tours. The theatre is very conservative. Yet in the event, no serious play of our century has been played so often or in such diverse settings, from theatre to boys' club, from cathedral to air-raid shelter, as *Murder in the Cathedral*.

## CHRISTIAN DRAMA

## “MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL” QUIZ

*Warning:* One of the following is a catch question

1. "The last temptation is the greatest treason:  
To do the right deed for the wrong reason."  
Famous lines—but in the play, what was the right deed, and what was the wrong reason?
2. Hugh de Morville, Richard . . . . . Fitz Urse, and . . . . . ?
3. (a) Who played Becket in the *film* of *Murder in the Cathedral*?  
(b) What was unusual about this casting?
4. (a) Can you describe the appearance of the Fourth Tempter in the film?  
(b) Who played the part?
5. Identify the speakers of the following lines:
  - (i) "You are Englishmen, therefore you believe in fair play: and when you see one man being set upon by four, then your sympathies are all with the under-dog. I respect such feelings, I share them."
  - (ii) "Fluting in the meadows, viols in the hall,  
Laughter and apple-blossom floating on the water,  
Singing at nightfall, whispering in chambers,  
Fires devouring the winter season,  
Eating up the darkness with wit and wine and wisdom!"
  - (iii) "Destiny waits in the hand of God, shaping the still unshapen:  
I have seen these things in a shaft of sunlight.  
Destiny waits in the hand of God, not in the hands of statesmen,  
Who do, some well, some ill, planning and guessing,  
Having their aims which turn in their hands in the pattern of time.  
Come, happy December, who shall observe you, who shall preserve you?  
Shall the Son of Man be born again in the litter of scorn?"
6. (a) What was the text of the Archbishop's sermon?  
(b) This was preached on December 25, 1170. What, therefore, was the actual date of the murder?  
How do you know?

Answers will be found on page 32.

# *The Next Twenty-one Years*

## A PLAN AND A PLAY

K. M. BAXTER

Who will dare to prophesy what this Society will be doing in 1977? Yet what reader of CHRISTIAN DRAMA can help wondering where the current will carry us, or towards what objective we should steer in the immediate future?

Students of the Snark will remember that the Bellman, leader of the Hunting,

"Bought a large map representing the sea  
Without the least vestige of Land,  
And the crew were much pleased when they found it to be  
A map they could all understand."

With diffidence, and hoping to interest at least some of the crew, let us attempt to enter upon our map one or two capes, bays and headlands, even a shoal or a lighthouse, even an area lettered "Here bee dragons" and see what the voyage to 1977 looks like when we have done so.

Immediately, we must refer to the new offices, which give us at least reasonable living space for our staff. We have great cause for gratitudo to S.P.C.K. for having housed us so long, but it is nevertheless a great relief to know that there is now somewhere for our Travelling Adviser to sit down, and for a visitor to the library to read the titles of plays without jogging the Librarian's elbow, or trampling on the National Secretary's feet.

Then there is the drive for new membership now launched under the direction of Miss Robins and with the assistance of Miss Nicholl and Mr. Linnell. Can we get our 3,000 members by 1957? If we can, can we then hope to put the New Pilgrims on the road again; can we provide scope for the inspiration of Miss Keily; and can we attempt a five-year plan likely to be of maximum practical use to the membership? Is it a pipe-dream that such a five-year plan might cover the establishment of regional centres corresponding to our regional groups, for "festivals" of Religious Drama? Ambitious, certainly; and we would have to begin on a small scale and in no way enter into rivalry with similar affairs of the British Drama League. But at a moment when the Spirit of Bottom broods strongly over the countryside and Everyman and his wife are eager to double the parts of Lion, Thisbe and Moonshine, there would, we believe, be no lack of competitors. By providing adjudicators, the Society could do much to help raise the standards of the work generally. We have plans brewing which might prove a grave temptation to stay-at-home types who have hitherto felt that their only sphere was in the local parish hall.

Pessimists may, through pursed lips, say "Where's the money coming from?" We don't yet know. But our last twenty-one years of existence have proved that when we find something that we are sure we have got to do, the money does turn up. Some ten years ago, S.P.C.K.'s recognition of our Society, as giving to the Church in the field of drama the same kind of service as S.P.C.K. gives through publications and films, brought us their generous financial support and their backing in many other ways. Last year, the Rockefeller Institute's grant enabled us to send Miss Joan Ford to investigate the state of Religious Drama on the Continent: The report shows clearly how much other countries are looking towards the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain (the *only* inter-denominational body concerned with this aspect of Christian evangelism) to give the lead in the use of drama for presenting Christianity to the unconverted, and we are greatly encouraged in our hope that we really are called to a work of importance in the reinterpretation of Christ to those outside the Christian tradition.

There are indeed shoals, and tempests, to be navigated. But is there any more certain challenge to the adventurous than the statement "Here be dragons"?

So much for the plan.

Now for the play. Twenty years ago I saw *Murder in the Cathedral*. I remember well the comments it aroused—angry, distressed, condescending, mystified or enthusiastic. That play has brooded over the waters of Religious Drama ever since and much creative activity has resulted from its influence. Is there an equivalent play for the next twenty years? I believe so, and I believe the play is Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

A temptation always to be resisted is that of reading into one play another play which the author neither wrote nor intended to write. It is clear that Mr. Beckett must be frequently astonished at the play *said* to have been written by him under the title of *Waiting for Godot*. I myself have been told that it is a play about Capital and Labour, a play of nihilistic despair about the human race, a cross-section of the Time-curve, a play of sheer sadism, an unintelligible leg-pull, a direct interpretation of Jung's Four Functions, a Mandala play with each dominant aspect of the Mandala standing on the hill turn by turn; and *The Times Literary Supplement* in a very illuminating article tells me that it is a play about the contemplative life. At last I go to see it; only to find that, to my ear and eye, it is a beautiful, penetrating, intelligible play of the Passion, the first Passion play which has ever wholly related the Suffering Servant to the grief of the contemporary world.

Thinking that I may have fallen into the temptation mentioned above, and have made the play quite other than its author intended, I have gone over the text with some care and the more I do so, the more vividly does the Passion theme emerge.

Consider the plot. Two tramps in a waste place outside the city, by a

hill on which there is a tree, wait for Godot whom they have never seen but who is going to visit them and put everything right for them. The place is the right place—but Godot didn't come today. The tramps are tempted to hang themselves on the tree, but resist the temptation for no other reason than that they have been told to wait for Godot. They are bored, but remain obedient. They are poor; they are also struggling to be chaste. They wonder if they wouldn't be better apart, but are clearly too closely linked ever to separate. Still Godot does not come. Instead of Godot two characters, Pozzo and Lucky, arrive. Pozzo (who answers also to the name of Cain and of Abel) is a boastful, bloated rich brute, dragging with him the servant Lucky, who carries all Pozzo's burdens, and is constantly beaten. Act I is largely occupied with conversation between Pozzo, who is really very lonely, and the two tramps, about Lucky—whom only speaks once, when he is on the hill at the death-place under the tree. What he says there is unintelligible to the people in the play. They spit on him and revile him. When Lucky is apparently more than half dead, Pozzo drags him off, one of the tramps saying to him "Oh, go to hell!" The tramps go on waiting. A Messenger Boy ("I keep the goats") comes to tell them Godot won't come today, but surely tomorrow.

The Second Act is in large measure a replica of the first with variations. Pozzo re-enters, blind and helpless, led on by the Servant, who then sleeps at the foot of the tree, till after a Messenger, who looks identical with the first but is different ("I keep the sheep") comes to tell the tramps that Godot will not come today either, but *surely* tomorrow. After the Messenger's departure the servant wakes, *rises*, puts whip and cord back into Pozzo's hands and gently leads Pozzo off in the direction of the city. The tramps see them go, but do not attempt either to stop them or to accompany them. They are waiting for Godot who will come "*without fail*" on the third day.

Now, as played, the prime meaning of this, among a wonderful complex of meanings, was abundantly clear. The Suffering Servant is *here*, in the midst, redeeming blind, brutal, lonely humanity; and no one, not even the praying soul whose two halves are represented by the tramps, noticed that the Passion is being re-enacted before his very eyes.

It would take too long to work out in detail the wealth of Christian symbolism in which the play abounds: the lack of understanding of these symbolic words and actions is yet another proof of the difficulty of communication to an audience ignorant of the very language of faith.

But it is worth drawing attention, in our present context, to a few of the differences between this play and *Murder in the Cathedral*. They are utterly different in texture and in implication. There is, you would say, very little "poetry" in *Godot*—nowhere the splendid choruses of the Women of Canterbury. The language is bare as the landscape: a mixture of agony with simplicity, as if an El Greco were using the palette of Piero della Francesca. There is very little formal discussion, none of the long speeches of the Knights, and no explicit sermonising as in the Archbishop's Christmas sermon. These differences are dictated by the setting

and Eliot was, of course, controlled by historical necessity as well as by the demands of a Cathedral play. Eliot uses the metaphors of the secular world to link the events of the Spirit to the historical events. All is coherent and polite. Samuel Beckett uses Christian symbols with such bleak economy and truth that few even among Christians recognise them for what they are: even the lovely passages which recall the versicle and response of compline—mood sifting down through meaning—are regarded by some as the crosstalk of bored comedians. Strange indeed that the poet of *The Wasteland* should, as playwright, write only of the Princes of the Church and of the people with bank balances, large properties, and private collections—for if there is a play properly the Christian sequel to *The Wasteland*, *Godot* would seem to be that play.

In addition to the debt everyone owes to poets for their unacknowledged legislation, our Society owes to Mr. Eliot over the last twenty-one years an unrepayable debt for having made drama heard in the Church, and then for having made religious themes acceptable in the theatre. In this work we, our President, and our Chairman of Council have created the conditions of existence for a drama truly theocentric. May we not hope that somewhere a man as great as these is pondering how to make the news of the Eternal Passion available to souls in the Wasteland? Is it impossible that he may see that drama is, now as never before, at the service of a missionary Church; can as never before convey Good News to the outsider? Twenty-one years ago the novelty was that the Church received the Drama into its buildings. Will the next twenty-one years see the extrication of drama from the Church buildings, and the arrival of the Church itself in the Wasteland?

This is surely a development in line with what we of this Society should pray for—an attempt to translate the doctrine of the Passion into terms of the common despair of the world today. Not to recall the past, not to celebrate the great of the Church or the world, but to get in beside the suffering servants, to preach recovery of sight to the blind, to affirm the presence and the action of Christ in the most unlikely situations. Is not our great danger, the recurrent danger of all religious movements, that of losing touch with the outsider? And is it not the outsiders, the Pozzos of the world, brutal and boisterous but confessing their blindness, whom the suffering Servant, risen from His three days' sleep, leads towards the City, while our eyes are holden and we know Him not?

It is perhaps too much, yet some of us do entertain the hope that our Society may, in the course of the next twenty-one years, be used as a bridge between the Church and the world outside the Church, and that we may be able to move forward from *Murder in the Cathedral* towards atonement in the Wasteland.

# Notes from the Back Pew

## A Note on "Youth"

[From a study, sponsored by King George's Jubilee Trust, of the adolescent boys and girls of England.]

"In all this the real point was that too often the organisations were not sensing current tastes. They failed signally to recognise the great weight that 'modernity' carries in the average artisan home, symbolising as it does those things that the working class family of the past was only able to achieve by great self-sacrifice, or by a fluke. 'Modern' was so vital a word to these boys and girls, and to most of the adults of their world, that it behoved any unit which professed to teach the good life to appear up-to-date itself."

*Some Young People* by Pearl Jephcott. Allen & Unwin, 1954

## What they Say

A little eavesdropping after the play can be very instructive. For example:

After a New Pilgrim Players performance of *Holy Family*:

Housewife: "Ever so good, wasn't it? Rather highbrow, you know . . . all out of the Bible. . . . I mean, if you don't know your Bible, where are you?"

Elsewhere, a churchwarden to a playwright:

" . . . But so many people don't believe in the Resurrection. What we need is a *non-doctrinal* Easter play. . . ."

Hm. . . .

## "One Man in His Time. . . ."

Casting difficulties are not so new. Shakespeare as a boy may have seen a religious play called *The Repentance of Mary Magdalene*, in which a cast of four played a total of *fourteen* parts. Happy to relate, it was reviewed as "not only godly, learned and fruitful, but also well furnished with pleasant mirth and pastime." And what better praise could a hard-working group receive?

Talking of Shakespeare, one wonders what lies behind the terse entry in the Stratford-on-Avon records: "To the King's Players for not playing in the Hall . . . 5s."?

## Beaver!

This column feels that a protest should be made about beards in Religious Drama. This Easter, enough crêpe hair was in use throughout Great Britain to stuff a sofa, judging by results. On television, an impressive array of beards was to be seen, even upon St. John, who is usually clean-shaven.

Is it all really necessary? "Biblical" beards may be true to history, but they cover up the most expressive area of the face. Furthermore, they make the unhappy wearers indistinguishable from each other at a distance, which has been known to cause considerable confusion in the audience.

Will R.D.S. support the slogan, "Down with Beards"?

#### Footnote

A reason for non-appearance at rehearsal, vouched for by the West Suffolk Drama Bulletin:

"My husband works for the baking powder company, and naturally rises early, so I have to go to bed early."

CAPELLA.

## *A Question of Standards*

CHRISTOPHER EDE

Religious Drama is a form of worship. The fact that it is, or can be, a form was discussed by J. Alan Kay in the Spring number of *CHRISTIAN DRAMA*. Drama, however, is essentially public, and therefore, when public worship is considered, various conditions are implied which need to be examined. Drama cannot fulfil its purpose without an audience which, while remaining outside the action in a physical sense, does in varying degrees join with author and players in a common experience. This power to influence others by action and the spoken word is considerable and though we cannot today recapture the impact of the first Easter trope on an illiterate people, the impact is still present, a power for good or ill.

The wielding of this power is a great responsibility, not fully realised by some, and often confused by the double nature of Religious Drama when considered as an act of worship. This double nature consists of an offering to God of the work done, and the inspiration that it should give to those who witness the work. In presenting a play, it should be realised that the players are setting themselves up, as it were in a pulpit, to show by their work and varying gifts, some new aspect of an act of worship. This may be done in all sincerity and humility and yet fail in the eyes of their fellows.

Much drama practised up and down the country is of little account, and as some of this is labelled Religious Drama, it is worth enquiring where the weaknesses lie. It must be presumed that the sincerity of effort in groups undertaking Religious Drama is beyond question. But sometimes this very sincerity blinds the group to their standards; the very fact that the group is doing its best, working perhaps in a church, tends to smother criticism so that a feeling is created that the end justifies the means. If a

group choose to worship through drama—and the choice is theirs alone—then they must set out to learn and perfect as far as they are able the craft and art of production and acting. There is sometimes a fear that Religious Drama may become too theatrical, though it is never voiced that our churches are too architectural, our choirs too choral, or our music and public prayers too musical or literary.

The Christian Church has inspired artists and craftsmen for centuries and much of their work is part of our heritage. The work was done for the glory of God and the inspiration of their fellows, and they used their talents to the best of their skill. Because a painting was done for a church, no excuse was offered that, as it was a religious act, the ordinary standard did not apply. The craftsman finishing a piece of carving did not say to his fellows, "That side is a bit crude, my chisel got a bit blunt, but it is my offering to God." Are our chisels as sharp as they might be? Do we make excuses? Have we even the courage to look at our chisels to see if they are blunt?

The weakness of these parallels is that drama can be undertaken with very little technique. Technique is either despised or overvalued by amateurs, despised because it is thought to be, quite wrongly, an ability to be insincere, or overvalued as some magic key which the professional has and the amateur has not. Technique is simply a way of setting about a task—no more, and no less. It is unfortunate that drama in its elementary stages requires little or no technique. To join a choir the individual needs a voice, an ability to sing in tune, and some proficiency in reading music. In drama, however, it is possible to achieve a little without great gift or experience, since the skills used are those used in a limited way in everyday life. Once the inexperienced and untrained player is faced with a large church to fill with his voice, shortcomings become immediately apparent. Clumsy gesture and movement, monotony of speech and lack of that nebulous quality called attack and projection are common faults.

Once the faults are recognised, steps can be taken to remedy them. It is easy to write, "Training and Practice," but there is no other solution to the improvement of standards. There are plenty of opportunities today for the serious study of drama. Summer schools, courses, advisers of various kinds, and books without number. All these may help at the start, but for the continuation of training the individual must rely on himself. The amateur producer is nearly always required to undertake some training during rehearsals, in addition to the major task of directing the play—a double responsibility that few are really qualified to undertake, nor is there time at rehearsals to teach one member of the cast to breathe, for example. Elementary training need not be complicated nor arduous, nor need it frighten any beginner.

It is true to say that the general standard of production from a technical point of view is improving all over the country. This is understandable when it is realised that much of a producer's work is a craft that can be learnt. What is now needed is some attention to the more difficult part of

the work, the art of interpretation and stimulation. Producers are apt to miss "the wood for the trees," and get involved in practical details without first finding out what the play is about. There is a special difficulty in dealing with many religious plays, for the plot or story is often so well known that no re-examination is thought to be necessary. Furthermore, producer and audience feel on familiar ground and the need to think *dramatically* is not realised. To clarify this vital point, one example may be quoted. In the Chester Miracle Play of the Passion, the Last Supper is very close in translation to the Authorised Version, so that knowledge of the actual text is not necessary to the appreciation of the problem. The problem is that of Judas' exit from the Upper Room. Simple and so well known, until a study of the scene is undertaken *in terms of drama*. The solution or solutions, for there are always several solutions to dramatic problems, brings a shattering impact, and fulfils the essence of drama, that action is stronger than words.

All Religious Drama must be thought of in terms of drama and treated as such. If a theme does not gain by dramatic treatment it is better left alone.

Armed with this approach, the producer should go to the quiet of his study—where a great deal of his work should be done. Three questions have to be answered: "What is the play about?", "How has the author expressed the idea?", and finally, "How best can the idea be conveyed dramatically so that the ideas are conveyed to an audience of mixed intellectual and emotional powers?" By the study of the play, the answers to the first two questions will emerge; the answer to the third calls for knowledge of the craft, and experience in the handling of players. Deep study of the play before meeting the players does not mean that the producer comes armed with a fixed plan of the whole production, for the players are human beings—not puppets—and every production is a synthesis, the sum of contributions from producer and players.

The second task of a producer is that of a stimulant, and in the course of stimulation he should lead, not drive. It is well to remember that in the early stages, the producer is, or should be, well ahead of the players in understanding and conception of the finished work. The player has a complicated task, involving the marrying of ideas expressed by the producer with his own conception and contribution to the part, the learning of lines and moves, and the appreciation of reactions from other players in the scene. The producer should hurry slowly. An actor once stopped a producer during a rehearsal and said, "I admire your psychological insight into my part, and I find it very interesting, but what I want to know at this moment is where to put my feet." By hurrying slowly the producer will find that there is always something new to be added at each rehearsal, and this promotes a feeling of progress as opposed to endless repetition. Repetition there must be until the mechanics are learnt and the players are free to act, but each rehearsal should take them a step nearer the completed picture.

Production is a personal thing, depending largely on the personality

of the producer and his understanding of players and their problems, so that no rules can be laid down for the conduct of rehearsals. One further point should be remembered by producers, the fact that the players have to play the play in the end. Therefore they must have a chance to run the play through without interruption well before the dress rehearsal. Rehearsals are for the benefit of the players, not the producer, and the temptation to tinker and improve up to the last minute must be resisted. There is no end to improvements, but if they are likely to upset the play at a late hour, they are better forgotten.

There is no room in a short article to pursue the problems of production and acting, but if standards are to be raised the first step is to recognise that the problems exist. Religious Drama should promote thought much the same way as a good sermon, and like a good sermon, it should be audible, understandable, ordered and stimulating. These qualities do not happen by accident, they require thought, knowledge, a power of expression and communication, and a belief in the chosen medium as a means of sharing an experience with others. Some of these qualities are gifts, but gifts that have to be cultivated; others can be acquired by study and hard work and practice.

The parable of the talents should never be far from the thoughts of those who worship through drama.

## *“The Power and the Glory”*

DONALD FITZJOHN

This play, which has recently concluded a limited run at the Phoenix Theatre, was adapted by Dennis Cannan and Pierre Bost from Graham Greene's novel about Communist Mexico. The period is the 'thirties, when the atheistic Government closed the churches and hunted the priests. The story centres round the last practising priest still alive; his efforts to evade his pursuers and at the same time follow his calling, his thoughts and feelings regarding both his present situation and his past life, and the effect that his presence as a man of God has upon the people with whom he comes in contact during the course of his journeys. There are numerous episodes and a large number of characters, all vividly drawn and all helping to create the atmosphere of abandonment that may be said to be the keynote of the story.

With some ingenuity the adapters reduced the number of episodes from six, though each was preceded by a tableau designed and produced to convey the heat and the squalor and the general sense of desolation succinctly described in the novel. But the omission of many of the episod-



E. MARTIN BROWNE AS BECKET  
A wartime production at Cambridge



THE FOUR TEMPTERS

The Mercury Theatre 1935  
Robert Speaight as Becket  
Robert Speaight as Becket

THE FOUR TEMPTERS

The Old Vic 1953

Robert Donat as Becket  
Producer, Robert Helpmann  
Designer, Alan Barlow





THE DEATH OF BECKETT

Gloucester Cathedral 1955

Produced by E. Martin Browne, who played Becket

necessitated also the elimination of several characters. One looked in vain, for instance, for *Coral Fellows*, the young girl who made such an impression on the priest and who, like him, dies a violent death, for *Luis*, the boy who seems to scoff but finally reveals his innate religious feeling, and for *José*, the renegade priest, who, to save his life, has married a hrewish wife, and is content to endure the constant jeers of the local children. The disappearance of these and others diminished not only the action of the story but also the character of the priest, for so many of his thoughts were concentrated on them that it was through them we knew and understood him. As it was, we were shown only the external traits of his character; his addiction to spirits, which earned him the title of whisky-priest, his lapse from celibacy, which resulted in an illegitimate child, and his lack of courage. We were not given sufficient indication of his everlasting remorse nor his tortured recognition of his own shortcomings. A far greater defect was the almost total absence of the tenderness which was so marked a characteristic of Greene's portrayal: the nostalgia for his lost innocence, the guilty love for his daughter, whom he knows he has assigned to a life of corruption, and his complete lack of resentment or blame towards Father *José*, who twice deserts him in moments of need.

The theme of betrayal is very marked in the novel. There is a moment when the priest realises that the half-caste with whom he is obliged to share a hut intends to inform on him and claim the Government reward. From that moment on he is haunted by this figure, taking his presence after a while almost as a matter of course and finally going knowingly to his doom at the betrayer's instigation. The man himself is genuinely aggrieved that the priest neither trusts nor condemns him, but merely pities him. This situation between these two characters would, one might have thought, have lent itself to dramatic treatment, but it was not particularly effective on the stage, partly because the half-caste was merged with another character, a beggar, and thus became blurred, but rather because the adapters were unwilling to explore to the full the Graham Greene thesis that we are all as we are, unchangeable and condemned to play the parts allotted to us.

The main conflict of the novel, however, so far as the characters are concerned, is between the priest and the police lieutenant, who pursues him relentlessly and comes across him twice without knowing who he is. There is an interesting relationship between the two characters, for the priest is a bad man who follows a way of life that is good and the lieutenant is his direct antithesis. The lieutenant's single-mindedness—his hatred of the Church, his fear of sex, his desire to bring happiness to the people by the destruction, violent if need be, of those things he considers evil—renders him a simple character compared with his adversary, who has many different levels of thought and feeling. Here, too, in the play an opportunity was lost. The lieutenant did not stand out sufficiently, in spite of a good performance by Harry Corbett, as the priest's direct antagonist. Thus, the irony of the scene at the end of the second act when the lieutenant gives the priest five pesos, which happens to be the price

of a mass, and allows him to leave the prison, is partly lost, while the final scene between the two of them, which in the novel fully cements the different points of view, was cut too short to come over with sufficient clarity.

The finer points of the book, then, were lost, and in their place we have a series of clever groupings and effective settings, extremely well lit while dominating all was the performance of Paul Schofield, who succeeded in suggesting some of the qualities with which the authors have failed to endow the part of the priest. By the end of the evening he had almost persuaded us that the weary, disillusioned man who went to his death was in fact the martyr to his own remorse Graham Greene has created.

## *“The Vanishing Island”*

URSULA NICHOLL

*A Musical Play in Three Acts, by Peter Howard and Cecil Broadhurst  
Music by Will Reed and George Frazer.*

The Moral Rearmament play presented at the Hippodrome in June 1956 is a very good musical in the idiom of Gilbert and Sullivan posing the problem of modern life—regimentation versus freedom—and both corrupt.

Odioso, the Ambassador from Weiheit'tiu (We Hate You) arrives on the Island of Eiluph'mei (I Love Me) and for his people demands a share in their riches. The inhabitants of the Island, whose name, we are told, may be interpreted as “Land of Liberty” or “Land of Licence” according to which dictionary you use, refuse to believe in the menace of Odioso, who curses the Island, tells them it will vanish and departs. Alarmed, the I Love Me's send a delegation after him in order to make a peaceful settlement but their King is doubtful of its success as his people have not yet adopted for themselves the idea of “the new kind of man”—“honest, pure, with a passion and a plan and the secret to set men free.” Meanwhile in “We Hate You” the people prepare for their visit with implacable hatred. Odioso refuses to renounce this hatred for the sake of his child and when the delegation arrives, after some discussion in which neither side will give way, puts them under arrest: “Roll on thou tide of fortune, roll our way, sweep with remorseless power upon our prey.” The delegates are then returned to their Island to find it beginning to vanish, and tell of the desperate situation. The deadlock is resolved in Act III by the “I Love Me's” adopting the Superior Ideology taught by their King and acknowledging their wrong attitude. The women extend a loving hand to the wife of Odioso, show her that there is a way of life in which her baby can be brought up without hate, and win her heart by an admission that it is due to their own wrong thinking and selfishness that hate arose.

Odioso is won through his wife to an understanding of love and freedom, and friendship is established between the two lands.

The standard of acting was high, marked by individual sincerity and viveliness and that American flair for speed and attack which we in this country so much admire. The production was good, although at times opportunities were missed for grouping and for using of elevations which would have added much to the visual effect. The music was good, attractive and appropriate and some of the lyrics were excellent. The play itself, however, although well written, was uneven. The inhabitants of the Island of "I Love Me," who one understood represented the democracies, were "guyed" to such an extent that it gave the audience no chance to believe in the situation or the people. But in Act II when we reach "We Hate You" both the author and the players found that necessary core of "truth." The marching song of the inhabitants who moved like robots throughout the scene, and the repudiation by Odioso of any special love for his child pointed with cutting meaning the mental and physical condition of those dictator countries where man has lost his right to be an individual and is taught hatred of all that is free. When, however, the delegation from "I Love Me" arrive the truth of the scene is again strained by two-dimensional writing.

In Act III truth was maintained and the play brought to a triumphant conclusion.

"It's a humble voice of a nation's choice to obey the King of Kings." This musical teaches an ideological way of life, stressing the necessity of change of heart in every man through this Superior Ideology (which we were told afterwards is the only alternative to Communism). Christ crucified was not preached, but the medium precludes such preaching. This play, then, falls short of Christian drama, but presents a "Superior Ideology" with a high ethical standard.

## News from the Continent

A European Theatre Conference was held at Trier in Germany from May 4 to 6, 1956. Delegates from several countries attended, and the speakers in the open discussion, chaired by M. Gabriel Marcel, the celebrated French playwright, included visitors from Belgium, England, France, Italy, Spain and Luxemburg.

The delegates discussed the topic: "The European Theatre in the ritual state of the world today"; the extent to which the European theatre is imbued with the Christian spirit, and the nature of the links between religion and the arts in the contemporary situation.

Plays were given on all three days of the conference, in the Trier Municipal Theatre, including the religious plays *Der schmale Grat* by Gabriel Marcel, and *Der Fischbecker Wandteppich* by Manfred Hausmann.

## NEW PUBLICATIONS

**Fit for a King.** Barbara Willard. (Garnet Miller, 2/6). HX. 1 act, 5 scenes. 9m.  
3w., angels, children, animals.

A simple Nativity play for a large cast of young people of various ages. Adaptable for production in churches or halls. (Fee: apply publisher.)

**The Jerusalem Gang.** Lesbia Scott. (Typescript.) H. 3 acts. 1m., 8b., 2g., n. boys and girls..

An original Holy Week play for teen-agers. It shows, hiding out in the Temple tannery, a gang of the young toughs of Jerusalem, whose outlook is revolutionised by the arrival of our Lord.

On Good Friday they organise a rescue (by their own methods) which fails on Easter Day when they hear the news that brings them to a greater allegiance than that of "the Gang."

This interpretation in terms of a boys' adventure story may seem over-sensational to some readers, but the dramatist has captured the spirit and idiom of young people at the "secret society" stage vividly, and there are some telling lines. The play can be recommended particularly to youth clubs and schools looking for an unconventional approach to the story of Easter. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

**My Strong Rock.** Eileen Chown. (Typescript.) HX. 1 act. 5m., 2w., 1b.

A group of Roman-British Christians take refuge in a church from the Jutish invaders. The problems of forgiveness and the apparent powerlessness of good are seen in the light of their desperate situation. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

**Over the Hills to Nazareth.** Cyril J. Davey. (Epworth Press, 2/-.) HX. 7 scenes. Large cast of children.

Some of the Parables dramatised for performance by children: the Lost Child, the Wedding Feast, etc., in seven scenes linked together by an adult narrator.

The series has been designed for Sunday School use. Scenes can be played separately, but the whole play employs all ages, with a special mime scene for the Primary, and could be used appropriately for a Sunday School Anniversary. (Fee: 2/6.)

**The Pedder's Way: a Masque of Walsingham.** Freda Collins and Johan Schaubberger. (Typescript.) H. Cont. act. Large cast.

Devised for a variable number of players, the Masque shows the history of the shrine of "Our Lady of Walsingham" in Norfolk, told by a modern Pilgrim to a group of cyclists.

Music was specially composed for the first production. (Fee: apply M. Collins, c/o R.D.S.)

**Phocas.** X. de Lafourcade. (J. Duffy and Co., 1/3.) H. 2 acts. 4m. (Fee: apply publishers.)

**Saul of Tarsus.** John Barton. (Typescript.) H. 6 scenes. 14m., 1w., soldiers, etc.

The story of St. Paul's development from the stoning of Stephen to his conversion at Damascus, in straightforward modern prose. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

*Also added*

**The Shadow of the Eagle.** Ronald Cockram. (S. French, 4/-). H. 2 acts. 6m., 4w. (Christian historical.) (Fee: £3 3s. 0d.)

## REFERENCE LIBRARY

**The Origin of the Theater.** B. Hunnigher. (M. Nijhoff.)

An essay by an American scholar. He examines the connections of the ear-

## CHRISTIAN DRAMA

religious Drama of the Middle Ages with surviving pagan ritual, and with a continuous theatrical tradition carried on from Roman times.

Illustrated by reproductions of manuscripts, masks, etc., of the period.

**Staging the Play.** Norah Lambourne. (Studio Publications, 18/-.) The "How to Do It" Series, No. 62.

A thoroughly practical and readable book on all aspects of scenic design: construction and building of scenery, the use of curtain settings, etc.

A section on open-air stages is illustrated by plans and photographs of the settings used for the Mystery Play productions at York and Coventry.

We recommend this book as a "must" for all producers and stage managers in search of information.

**Topics in Bible Drama.** Robert Duce. (Independent Press, 6/-.)

An introductory book for teachers in day schools and Sunday schools, about the use of drama in religious instruction. Notes on group playmaking and mime are given, and there is a chapter on puppetry.

*Also added*

**Going to the Theatre.** John Allen. (Phoenix House, 7/6.) "Excursions Series." Pub. 1949.

An informative guide for older children, designed to help them to understand and enjoy more on their visits to the theatre. The author illustrates his points of reference to his Children's Theatre production of *Tobias and the Angel*, which is analysed in some detail.

*Special Notes*

**Angels Unawares.** Stuart B. Jackman. (S.C.M. Press, 4/-.) H. 1 act, 3 scenes. 6m., 2w.

The text of the argument is not so much Hebrews 13: 2 as "He that receiveth one of these little ones in My name receiveth Me." The stranger entertained is not an angel, but Christ Himself.

Peter Fisher, ex-foreman of a British dockyard and noted "Red," brings home a badly injured Jew he has rescued from a street fight. While Peter's wife tends the Jew, Grimshaw (an ardent Party member) calls to demand action—talks with the boss are too slow, only sabotage will make him see reason. Peter refuses. In their own initiative the others put a bomb in a new ship, and unintentionally kill a worker. They return in panic to claim Peter as an alibi.

Faced with the alternatives: to betray his old comrades, or to condone violence, Peter decides to confirm their story. When the dockyard police arrive, however, the whole party is clearly in a dangerous position. Then Grimshaw has an inspiration: he accuses the Jew—a foreigner without friends, whose injuries could have been caused by the explosion. This suits everyone's convenience. Peter, at the crucial moment, is silent, and the Jew is removed by the police.

"Funny, isn't it," says Peter's daughter, "the way things don't change? . . . There's a sort of pattern, isn't there?"

The play is exciting, and the dialogue has the vehemence and forthrightness much needed in Religious Drama. It is the implications of the Christ figure that are controversial, and may completely invalidate the play for many Christians. The Jew shows one aspect only of Christ: the helpless suffering of the innocent "the hands of sinful men." In every person in need whom we neglect or exploit, Christ is crucified again. This is a valuable point; but it means that the Jew is presented as entirely passive, the weak object of pity and contempt. He is thus a serious distortion of the Original.

This would not matter so much if he were not personally Christ, but this is definitely implied. His hands are pierced: he recognises the other characters by their Biblical names: the last line of the play is, "Yes, I know who he was."

The play also leaves one in hopelessness. Judas always betrays, Peter always

denies, world without end. What about the Resurrection? Only a hint of it comes through, easily lost in performance.

Readers are recommended to study the play, and form their own judgment on a most interesting experiment.

*Note.*—The author intends it to be produced in church, as part of a service. R.D.S. can not endorse this. (Fee: apply publishers.)

*Erratum.*—In the Spring issue, the setting of *No Room* by F. Collins and Graham-Campbell was given as “the kitchen of the inn at Bethlehem.” In fact the play is in modern dress, and the setting is not intended to represent the original inn.

The article, “Drama and Common Life,” by Frances Glendenning, which appeared in the Spring 1956 issue of CHRISTIAN DRAMA, was reprinted by special permission of the World’s Student Christian Federation, in whose *Federation News Sheet* for May–June 1955 it first appeared. We apologise to the W.S.C.F. for the omission.



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## FAR AND WIDE

Reports and Reviews of Religious Drama Activities in Great Britain and Overseas

Ilham, S.W.12

St. Luke's Players gave four performances of James Bridie's *The Dragon and the Dove* (or, *How the Hermit Abraham fought the Devil for his Niece*), at the beginning of March.

This play is not so celebrated as the same author's *Tobias and the Angel*, but deserves to be as frequently performed. Bridie has the rare gift of being able to be both funny and moving at once. The hermit Abraham is a delightfully comic figure, as he sets out to the rescue, clad in the complicated monomongery of a Roman officer, and conscientiously practising "soldiers' ths." At the same time, he is brave and lovable and single-hearted, one of the few thoroughly good characters in Religious Drama that thoroughly convince.

His simple story, as Bridie tells it, is full of technical traps for the unwary. The St. Luke's Players, experienced in amateur drama, successfully avoided most of them, and gave a most attractive and skilful presentation, clearly the result of much thought and hard work. The setting and costuming of the inn scene were particularly good.

Though the players "took some time to warm up," in the main they had a good grasp of their parts, and neither over-sentimentalised nor over-clowned. Only the difficult climax of the last scene, when the hermit must dominate the evil characters to the point of apnoea, did not quite succeed.

There is a real need for more such plays, which can be included in the regular programme of amateur dramatic societies attached to a church. They often reach a wider audience than do the devotional plays done in church, and this presents a special opportunity to the playwright.

B. J.

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Boston, Mass., U.S.A.

A Festival of Religion and the Arts was presented by the School of

Theology, Boston University, and the Daniel L. Marsh Chapel, from April 11 to 15, 1956, in Boston.

Music and dance were included in the programme of talks and demonstrations. A session on "Creative Dramatics" was taken by Dr. Winifred Ward, of Northwestern University, and was followed by a performance of extracts from plays, illustrating "the Historical Relation of Drama and Religion." These were: the *Quem Quaeritis* trope, *The Castle of Perseverance*, *Dr. Faustus* (Marlowe), *Murder in the Cathedral*, and *A Sleep of Prisoners*, and they were produced by students of the School of Theology.

\* \* \*

### Bristol. The Guild of Cathedral Players

Ten years ago a small group of Old Boys of the Cathedral School and their friends met together, formed the Guild, and *Caesar's Friend* by Campbell Dixon and Dermot Morrah was chosen for their first production. In Lent of this year the wheel turned full circle and once again the same play was chosen as their tenth birthday offering to the worship of the Cathedral. All the hard work which during the past ten years has been put in by the acting members and by the producer paid dividends, for the play was rehearsed and presented in seven weeks.

Those who see these plays in the Cathedral all speak of the "sense of oneness" which they feel belongs to the Players and of the spirit of sincerity and reverence with which the plays are presented. As always each character was made a living person. The tortured, indecisive mind of Pilate, the cynical politics of Caiaphas and the fanaticism of Judas are but three of the characteristics which skilful acting brought out. The glowing colours of the costumes helped to make this play a living thing, and were a tribute to the hard work of the Working Party. The Passion chorales sung by the Cathedral choristers and the excellent lighting effects all contributed to make this

tenth anniversary offering a memorable one.

G. P.

\* \* \*

### Bromley, Kent

**Caesar's Friend**, by Campbell Dixon and Dermot Morrah.

For the first time, the Bickley and Widmore Guild of Players and the St. Luke's Drama Society, representing between them two of the parishes of the Deanery of Bromley, Kent, joined forces to present **Caesar's Friend**. The play was performed twice in each parish during Passiontide.

This play is, of course, very well known, and has been performed in many theatres as well as on radio and television. It deals with the story of the Passion, viewed from the position of Pontius Pilate, about whom the author has woven the tangle of party politics rife in Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago. We see the friction between Pharisee and Sadducee, the cunning of Caiaphas, the self-examining treachery of Judas and, above all, the quandary of Pilate who, knowing beyond doubt that he sends an innocent person to death, cannot follow his conscience because of fear of the Emperor, and the knowledge that one more disturbance will cost him his job. Watching this play, one cannot help but realise how easily it could all happen again today.

When this play is performed by secular societies, one often feels that a certain amount of the spiritual atmosphere, so essential to the plot, is missing, but such was not the case in Bromley. The fusing of the two societies produced a cast that could compare with many repertory groups in efficiency, but surpassed them in sincerity of feeling.

The acting as a whole was more than competent—crowd scenes were well managed and realistic, and, if individual characters must be mentioned, the parts of Pilate, Caiaphas, Annas and Claudia Procula were particularly deserving of praise. The costumes, all home made (in fact, but certainly not in appearance), and the lighting, were far above the average for an amateur company.

All in all, these were memorable

performances, and it is sincerely to be hoped that the efforts of the group will be continued, for with actors such as these, the future of Religious Drama in the Deanery is in safe hands.

\* \* \*

### Brompton

The Brompton Drama Group this year chose a modern morality play called **The Sinner**, by Elizabeth Stuley, and produced by Miss Ursula Nicholl. Her inspired interpretation of this most vital and interesting play filled me with admiration and resolution. I cannot believe that anyone who saw this production came away without feeling an awakening of his own conscience, so strongly and sincerely did the members of the cast convey the message of their parts. The Brompton Group is obviously an experienced one: the details of the production itself were a lesson to all who aspire to attempt Religious Drama, but it was not only the high technical standard that sent us home humble yet inspired to dedicate our lives and to the true Christian Way of Life, but rather the vivid impact on the congregation, by the performers, of the Christian teaching applied to our present unsettled and stormy existence, with the reminder that the one unchanging thing is the love of God our only hope of salvation.

H. H. C.

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### Calne, Wilts

**Pilgrim's Progress**, arr. Bennett.

It was a real pleasure to see the Calne Church Players when they made a return visit to the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral in March of this year. The last visit was in 1952 with **The Acts of St. Peter**. These Players have had considerable experience under the direction of Mrs. O'Hanlon and have given, as one would expect, a most competent performance. Their diction was excellent, costumes effective. The crypt of St. Paul's is not at all easy as a setting for the altar is so slightly raised. The Players brought with them their portable rostra, but the centre of the stage inevitably partly masked the altar and even so one was aware of their di-

lities at the end of the play when Christian was led up into Heaven.

This was a cut version of the play and, in general, it ran smoothly, though there were one or two moments when the cutting was apparent. The organ accompaniment and the singers were most effective though I wondered why St. Richard's Prayer and one or two other poems or hymns not written by Bunyan were included.

I wondered why more opportunity was not taken for movement and fun in the Vanity Fair scene. Nevertheless, the whole production was a real pleasure to watch. The standard of acting was high and I was glad that such a good congregation turned up at both performances to greet the Players.

C. R.

\* \* \*

### Douglas, Isle of Man

Two performances of Rodney Bennett's dramatisation of *Pilgrim's Progress* were given in the Gaiety Theatre, Douglas, in April this year, by the Isle of Man Christian Drama Group.

The company were all members of either the Church of England or the Methodist Church in the island, and several clergy and lay readers took part.

The production proved to be an exciting success, both with the cast and with the audiences; for some of the former, this was their first experience of acting in a professional theatre, and seeing the pictorial possibilities of the play explored with more resources than usual.

For the audience the producer writes, "There is an epidemic of people now reading *Pilgrim's Progress* to understand the book still more fully, and all the old family editions and the new publications are in great demand."

\* \* \*

### Durham. St. Hild's College

On Sunday evening, March 11th, we were privileged to watch a performance by the Durham County Fellowship of Religious Drama of *The Play of St. Hild*, which was written and produced by Miss D. R. W. Carr, the Durham County Drama Organiser. The play, which was moving in its

sincerity and simplicity, was given in St. Hild's College Chapel. The past merged with the present; and there was indeed a close co-operation between actors and congregation.

Flickering candle-light, lovely costumes, and the graceful grouping of those taking part, all combined to make the play beautiful to watch. Not least effective was the way the characters moved slowly down the dimness of the aisle into the light to bring to life incidents that happened centuries ago.

St. Wilfred, St. Aidan, a King of Northumbria, Bede, and Bregusuit bore testimony to the work of St. Hild. It was with awe that we heard her say: "As Hilda, Abbess of Whitby, I lived on this earth thirteen hundred years ago. . . . The spirit of God that dwelt in me still lives, and is active in others, though my earthly body has been long dead."

There was a smooth change to give us incidents in the life of St. Hild and to show us how she inspired monks and nuns to work; we saw children being taught, and the miracle of Caedmon, the cowherd and poet.

That all work is to the glory of God was clearly the message of the play; and there was inspiration in the example of the lives of others. As the characters moved slowly away from the light, down into the darkness of the Chapel, one felt the need of quiet meditation in order to remember and be thankful.

Miss Carr is to be congratulated for giving us such an enriching experience, and thanked most warmly on her very generous effort for St. Hild's College Brick Fund.

A. S. (A member of the congregation.)

\* \* \*

### East Ham

By courtesy of the Vicar of St. Barnabas' Church, E.12, the "Anons" were able to present Christopher Fry's *A Sleep of Prisoners* in the church for two performances in March.

Visually, the production was well designed, and fitted appropriately into the broad chancel of St. Barnabas'. There was also much to admire in the playing of the four soldiers, especially in that of Tim Meadows, a tall, thin

man whose slow, steady Welsh intonation was rather unexpected but entirely suited to the character. Curious to note, direct "preaching" seems to be more acceptable to an audience from a Welshman than from an Englishman, as Mrs. Baxter noted in writing *T'Other Shift*. Certainly here there was none of the restiveness that some critics felt at Meadows' long final speech as spoken at St. Thomas', Regent Street.

Unfortunately, the acoustics of the church could scarcely have been less helpful. In some of the more passionate outbursts, one could hear approximately one word in four, and though the volume of noise was quite deafening, the sense was lost. To add to the confusion, recorded music was used from time to time to underline the action, film fashion, and eliminated several pages of dialogue altogether.

Apart from this, the production was an interesting one of a fascinating play.

B. J.

\* \* \*

#### Herne Hill (Congregational Church) A Man's House

On Tuesday and Friday in Holy Week, our Church Drama Group repeated this magnificent play by John Drinkwater, which they performed some six or seven years ago, with equally impressive results.

The disruptive impact of Jesus upon a wealthy Jerusalem family which prides itself upon its respectability is very striking. First the younger daughter becomes a follower, then the brother of the head of the household, and next a serving lad. The elder daughter, whose blindness has made her bitter and cynical, has her sight restored by Jesus. She falls in love with a Roman officer, to discover to her horror after the Crucifixion that it was he who administered the last spear-thrust. The head of the family, bewildered by these events, is bullied by his son, whose thoughts are only for the prosperity of the business and the disgrace brought by friendship with a felon. In the end, as his family leaves him to follow the risen Nazarene, the father begins to wonder if there is not something more important than mere

respectability—"What does it profit man . . . ?"

The cast wished to remain anonymous, and therefore no mention may be made of individuals, but they deserve our thanks for each making sincere contribution to a very moving performance.

\* \* \*

#### Leeds

Hunslet Parish Church produced "With One Accord," the Whitsuntide Episode from Miss Jessie Powell's play *Power from on High*, outside, on mobile stage, as part of their Whitsuntide celebrations. At this church it is traditional that, at Whitsuntide, the Sunday School children and older members of the congregation should march round the parish in procession, stopping at various points for hymn singing and prayers. This year the route planned for the procession was shorter than usual, and the last stop was at the point where the stage was already set up and ready on a piece of wasteground. So the play was the culminating part of the afternoon's proceeding, and the story of what happened in the Upper Room on the first Whitsunday was witnessed by a considerable crowd of people.

Since the play produced was partly only of *Power from on High*, Miss Jessie Powell kindly wrote a special introduction for one of the characters, John Mark, to say. This gave the setting for the action and enabled the audience to follow it more easily. Most of the audience had to remain standing for the performance, yet a complaint heard afterwards was that the play was all too short! This was perhaps a tribute both to the play's power to grip and to the ability of the players, some of whom had had very little previous stage experience.

\* \* \*

#### Middlesex

##### Pleasure and Pain in Education

At their Social Studies Conference on April 19th, the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds presented an excellent dramatic documentary concerning education from the days of Queen Elizabeth I to the present day.

The script was arranged with much

genuity by Marion Jay in consultation with Alison Graham-Campbell. The production, put on by the North Middlesex Federation, was a masterpiece of team-work in which the Middlesex Education Authority played prominent part. The music, chosen by Helen Anderson from music of different periods, was directed by Marice Brooksbank assisted by the Belmont Afternoon Choir.

The interest in the production was heightened by the explanations at the beginning by the author, the music and drama advisers and the instructor responsible for the class in costume making. They explained how the play had been built up, and invited the audience to enjoy back-stage secrets regarding such matters as the adaptation of the ingenious home-made costumes, which reappeared in different guises throughout the performance.

The production never flagged. There was considerable talent among the actors, who sincerely felt the need to express their message. This they did with buoyancy and humour. The narrator—Iris Partridge—needs particular mention for her lively impersonations which bound the whole play together.

This was a united drama achievement of high standard. If the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds have set such a fine lead, why should not other societies, including R.D.S., use Documentary Plays with equal advantage?

\* \* \*

#### Newcastle, Staffs

Newcastle Christian Drama Society has not recorded its productions in this magazine for some three years, but it does not mean it has ceased to be active. In 1954, it had a Henri Ghéon production, touring both **Christmas in the Market Place** and **The Way of the Cross**, both very successfully. Nearly every important area in North Staffordshire was touched by one or other of the productions. In 1955, André Gide's **Noah** was successfully staged in Newcastle.

This year we have had the privilege of trying out a new Passion Play by the Rev. A. A. Baker, **The Foot of the**

**Cross**. This deals with the last twenty minutes of our Lord's life, as seen not only by the traditional figures, but by the Centurion and by the Penitent Thief on his cross. This latter conception is not only novel, but immensely moving. The play toured Anglican and Free Churches, and was at home in the Passiontide worship of any church.

\* \* \*

#### The New Century Players

Telling a simple story Christopher Fry's play **The Boy with a Cart** covers time and space with a sure and lovely movement spiced with humour and clothed in delicate verse. The production by the New Century Players began with a few bars of traditional music played on the organ and recorder and promised to be fresh and exciting. When the curtain of this lovely little theatre rose to reveal the back wall of the stage, the wires and naked bricks scarcely hidden by whitewash, one was still prepared to let imagination supply the clouds, the sudden rainstorms and the rolling hills of Sussex among which the play is set.

Disappointment soon followed, however. The cast did little to further the exciting sweep of events. Surrounding Cuthman are the unchanging characters of the people of Sussex as human and timeless today as they were when he lived. His mother, whom he carries in a cart, is a character as full of incidental humour as an egg is full of meat. This part was unfortunately played as tragedy—a quite inconceivable interpretation.

The handling of the two choruses was marred by poor speaking, including some mispronunciations of words in common usage, and by the fact that with a small cast the two choruses—one of narration and one of neighbours and villagers—were rolled into one, thus losing the contrast between objective commentating and the free style of direct speech between the chief characters and members of the crowd.

The play abounds with small parts which are a delight to any actor; these were played by members of the chorus (a further confusion) with little or no appreciation of the down-to-earth

humour which is so much part of our everyday life.

The performance was well attended and it seemed a great pity that this very human little play could not have been given a more sympathetic production.

R. L.

\* \* \*

### Nottingham

The *Passiontide Mime, The Story of Holy Week*, presented in St. Mary's Church, will long live in the memory.

It is hard to imagine a more sensitive portrayal of our Lord, devoid of cloying, sentimental piety and equally remote from that vigorous, virile conception which ignores the "Man of Sorrows," bearing the sin of the world. Beautifully acted, this aspect was stressed, and rightly so. Were the robes worn a shade too elaborate for One so poor Who "had not where to lay His head"? This is a minor detail.

If we expected to see bearded disciples, there was nothing to jar in their unconventional appearance. A somewhat youthful-looking Pilate played the difficult part with dignity, suggesting the weak, decadent, cynical character of the Gospel narrative.

Music, richness of colour and the sombre background added to the effect of the impressive scenes from the Triumphal Entry to the Cross, but perhaps the most poignant and moving moments were in those intimate scenes of the Feet Washing and Last Supper and in the appearance of the Risen Lord to St. Thomas with the climax of the memorable words, "My Lord and my God."

Such an outstanding performance should deepen devotion and bring to those outside a worshipping community a new vision of the meaning of the Cross and Passion. Nottingham owes a debt of gratitude to producer, reader and players who took part so reverently in this piece of the Church's work of evangelism. D. E. B.

\* \* \*

### Putney

The Putney Church Dramatic Guild presented Isabel S. Squires' *New Wine* as their Easter play this year.

The story takes us from Peter's

denial on Maundy Thursday to the transformation at Pentecost, so that the scene in the garden of the Resurrection comes as a mid-way peak in the action, not as a climax. In this way, it can be discussed in more detail than usually possible.

Miss Squires goes out of her way to explain and interpret in the simplest modern terms. One remembers particularly the competent counsellor technique of Mary Magdalene and Thomas, as they deal with a mixed group of doubtful converts; the chief points are very tellingly put, and there is a cheerful flavour of "Harrigan" about the whole scene.

The other side of this, however, is that the dramatist's manipulation of her characters to make points for the benefit of the audience becomes too obvious in places. They are sufficient, real for this to be noticeable.

The dialogue is exceptionally colloquial, for a play produced in church. At first, the audience seemed a little startled to hear "Blimey" and "What says, goes," and (about Malchus) "Rummy that was about his ear," but they soon became accustomed to it and brisk modernity was certainly preferable to "Biblicalese." Indeed, it might have been put over more confidently, and in secular surroundings would probably have gained effectiveness.

The production was well acted by a sincere and thoughtful cast. B. J.

\* \* \*

### Romsey, Hants

A *Passion play in mime, It Is Finished*, was presented in Romsey Abbey towards the end of March, by members of the congregation under the direction of Mr. Sutton Vane.

The chancel of Romsey Abbey gave an overwhelming impression of vastness and solemnity in the semi-darkness; no more awe-inspiring setting could be imagined. Within this framework, the group played with undoubted sincerity and reverence.

The effect, however, was disappointing, largely owing to a confused fusion of styles. The players were authentically dressed in Eastern costume, but were called upon to perform

the stylised kind of mime that is essentially unrealistic. This led to some unintentional jarring moments: the Nailing to the Cross, for example, suggested the utmost realism in its visible detail, and yet was performed with the slow deliberation of ritual, with conflicting results. If the group were to concentrate on one or the other of the possible interpretations, many of the difficulties of the mime as it stands would disappear.

Similarly, there was a noticeable lack of animation. Admittedly, the size and acoustics of a church such as Bromsey Abbey forbid too much speed of movement and voices; but if we are to convey to modern audiences the essential relevance of the Gospel, we must surely either lift the action to a meditative plane where the dimensions of space and time are suspended—or show the people of the Passion story as vivid human beings like ourselves, moving and speaking as naturally as circumstances permit. To mix the two methods and produce a kind of slow-motion panorama risks the comment, "This isn't about real people. It's nothing to do with *my* life and problems."

We hope that the group have several years before them in which to work on and re-present the mime at Easter time, and that it will grow into a valuable part of the regular life of the church.

B. J.

\* \* \*

#### South-East London

On Saturday, May 26th, at St. Dunbyn's Church, Upper Norwood, the churches of the South-East Group of the Metropolitan Auxiliary of the London Missionary Society presented *Man's Need*, by Joyce Prior. Based on the book *Hungry Men* by the Rev. Leonard Hurst, the play consisted of a series of scenes set in different parts of the world, depicting in turn man's need for food, health, education, community and God. The scenes were connected by a narrator sitting in the hall at the side of the stage. The prologue, an excellent piece of modern verse, opened the play with a forceful challenge that was maintained and strengthened throughout.

The fact that the play required a cast of over thirty-six, but that each scene was self-contained, made it very suitable for production by a group of churches.

\* \* \*

#### Southgate Council of Christian Churches

"Oh prodigal sons of earth, did you watch, did you mark  
How God is love? Do you say, as we say it, Amen?"

About three thousand people have been asked this question at the end of the performances of R. H. Ward's *The Prodigal Son* which has been taken "on tour" by the Southgate Council of Christian Churches Drama Committee. That some have answered it in their hearts we have evidence, and we hope that many others of whom we have no knowledge have also done so.

A report of the Committee's venture should begin with a reference to the Dedication Service during March when the Rev. Norman Gee, the Drama Committee's Chairman, reminded us that in telling a story in dramatic form we were following the example of Jesus, who often made his point by means of a story.

The tour began on Good Friday with two performances of the play to Rover Scouts at Gilwell Park and continued with eight performances at different churches in the Southgate area. In most cases there was a full house, and at all the performances the audiences were appreciative.

The parable on which the play is based came through well in all its essentials—the love of the Father; the sin, repentance and forgiveness of the Prodigal Son; and the condemnation of the Elder Brother's lack of charity. In addition, the deeper implications were brought out: the kind of love which gives man free will; the subtleness of sin—the person who strives to live a full life and the person who refuses to venture into life thinking that respectability is another name for Christianity are both sinners; and God's readiness to forgive us all—

"No man deserved forgiveness: all men have it

Who seek where it abides."

The play was well cast. Some of us

may have seen ourselves in the Prodigal Son, falling naturally into sin in the very pursuit of truth; many of us probably found ourselves to be very like the Elder Brother, self-righteous, self-satisfied, and smug; the Father was a human father, yet pointing to some of the attributes of God's Fatherhood; Mother was motherly and practical; the Presenters, acting sometimes as Chorus, discussing the action, sometimes as personalities taking part in it, proved as effective as we had hoped; and the whole production by Edgar Chaplin was admirable. The impact of the play was greatly enhanced by skilful lighting and the imaginative use of music.

It was with a certain amount of trepidation that the Committee chose what perhaps could be regarded as a "rather difficult" play but, from the reception given to it from the very first performance to the Rover Scouts at Gilwell, it was clear that we need not have feared: with thoughtful production and good acting it has proved a very moving play, with touches of humour and food for thought for all.

\* \* \*

### Southgate

**Himself He Gave**, a new play by Mr. T. H. Henderson, was performed for the first time on Palm Sunday evening in Southgate (The Bourne) Methodist Church, London, N. The presentation of a Passion Play has now become an annual event in the life of this church, but this year's production was particularly noteworthy because the play was written especially for the occasion by a member of the congregation.

The play pursued the theme of self-giving, and fell into two distinctive parts. The first was based on dramatised incidents in the lives of Moses, David, Hosea, and Jeremiah, showing their reactions in crises of national or personal history. In the second part, four brief episodes aimed to illustrate how the Supreme Self-giving Life was received: first, on coming into the world; second, on revealing Himself by word and deed; third, by His disciples, perplexed by His startling purpose; and finally, the disciples'

joyous acceptance of that purpose at His Resurrection.

The play was written for a small group of men and women, each whom represented several characters in succession, as the various scenes required, a factor which made unity throughout the whole production. The presentation was remarkable in its dignity and simplicity, and constituted a worthy offering to church's worship, being truly edifying to behold, and stimulating thought and contemplation in a much wider field.

Southgate Methodist Church is doing fine work in the presentation of Religious Drama, and it is to be hoped that the congregations of the future will be privileged to witness the production of plays as inspiring as  **Himself Gave**.

J. C. H.

\* \* \*

### Southwark

Owing to the vagaries of London Transport and the mistaken idea on the part that it is quicker by tube, I was late in arriving at Southwark Cathedral Chapter House for Miss Ursula Nicholl's splendid production for Southwark Cathedral Drama Group of **I was in Prison** by Morwenna Bielby, a play about the Quaker pioneer reformer, Elizabeth Fry. I say splendid because it was not until afterwards that I realised the overwhelming architectural disadvantages of the Chapter House as a theatre, which had not been overcome but turned to advantage by the producer. Imagine a low platform completely filling the end of a wide hall, with no proscenium and without any exits from the platform and you will have some idea of the task which the producer undertook. The play has two scenes, the sitting room of the Frys' house and Women's Yard in Newgate Prison, the platform was divided off centrally by a movable irregular partition screen from the back wall. This partition was swung away and the spot-lighting from the side and gallery was focused on the scene in use. The one small door, giving immediately on to the bottom of a flight of steps, led off the hall floor, and was used to great advantage in

Newgate scene, when the two gangways were also incorporated into the playing place.

The feminine rabble of Newgate (the most successful scene) might have stepped, if one can call it such, out of a Hogarth print.

This production owed so much to anonymous teamwork that it is almost out of place to mention individual players. Mention must be made, however, of the dignity and understanding shown by the player of "Elizabeth Fry" in a testing part.

G. S.

\* \* \*

### Martin-in-the-Fields

The posters outside St. Martin's advertised a "Christian revue": *Present Company Accepted*. This was an announcement full of possibilities. The notion of presenting Religious Drama revue or cabaret form has been much under discussion lately, and a few experiments have been tried on the continent, but no one so far has arranged a programme on any large scale. St. Martin's, moreover, is in a particularly advantageous position to attempt to "bridge the gap" between sacred and secular. Hopes ran high.

The "ground plan" of the revue, devised by Patrick Campbell, was a bold and interesting one. The front scene showed (symbolically) a sports stadium, a newspaper office and a cinema, representing contemporary worldliness, with a forlorn church spire in the background. The sketches were intended to show some of the problems confronting our society, linked together by the conflicting voices of "the church" and "1956." What has the church to offer the people involved in these problems? How can they be reached?

Some of the people under scrutiny, for example, were: the mother of a "ddy boy; the ex-thief with a record

to live down; the girl engaged to a young man in a hurry; a couple contemplating divorce; and (most explosive topic of all) the daughter of a tolerant English family announcing her engagement to a Jamaican.

What, then, was missing from the finished product? For in performance, the revue was disappointing. In the first place, this basic intention seemed to lose its way. In scene after scene, the problem was stated, often with wit, but its Christian relevance hardly emerged.

The two scenes about the colour bar illustrate this. Anyone would recognise the authenticity of the family welcoming the Jamaican to Christmas tea, and their reactions when the gaff is blown. The father exclaims, "My God, what *am* I to think?" Blackout. Everyone waited expectantly for some indication as to what he *should* think, for this is a subject on which we all need guidance. There followed a scene divided between an African tribal court and an English studio, illustrating the thesis that the morality of African tribes is superior to that of Chelsea artists—an interesting thought, but scarcely a climax to the preceding scene.

Secondly, the fact that the revue was played in St. Martin's itself produced jarring notes that production elsewhere might have avoided. The interior of a church (especially one so constantly filled by praying people, day in, day out), gives out a great theme in itself; any drama played against it must correspond in greatness, at least in its conception. Skittishness and triviality in the material of the revue, harmless in themselves, seemed very much out of place in such surroundings.

Mistakes are the stepping stone to successes, however, and there is every reason to hope that this experiment will lead to further and more vital exploration.

B. J.

ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ

1. The right deed was for Becket to accept martyrdom. The wrong reason was for him to accept it for the sake of the glory of sainthood, triumph over his enemies in heaven instead of upon earth.
2. The four murderers were Hugh de Morville, Richard Brito, Reginald Fitz Urse, and William de Traci.
3. (a) Father Groser, Rural Dean of Stepney.  
(b) Fr. Groser was a non-professional, leading a cast mainly composed of professional players.
4. (a) The correct answer is "No, I can't." The Fourth Tempter was represented by a disembodied voice to emphasise the subtlety of temptation.  
(b) The part was spoken by Mr. Eliot himself.
5. The speakers are:
  - (i) The First Knight, introducing the Knights' Apology.
  - (ii) The First Tempter.
  - (iii) The Chorus of the Women of Canterbury.
6. (a) "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will" (Luke 2: v. 14).  
(b) December 29, 1170. The second part opens with a procession of the Priests, to mark the passage of time: Christmas Day, St. Stephen, St. John the Evangelist, Holy Innocents, and the "From the Holy Innocents a day: the fourth day from Christmas whereupon the action leading to the murder begins.

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